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(632) 552-9907

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #12 (SO12)

(Conflict Reduced in Mindanao and Other Areas Vulnerable to Violence)

BY ROMER S. SARMIENTO, Correspondent

Treaty ratification by Senate bodes well for tuna industry

GEN. SANTOS CITY — The Senate has ratified an international fisheries principle that sets the conservation and management of tuna resources along the Pacific fishing grounds, it was learned on Sunday.

In a statement, Dr. Stanley Swerdlof, senior fisheries consultant for the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM), said the ratification of the Multilateral High Level Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, which “deals with resource sustainability will determine the state of the Pacific stocks in the years to come.”

The ratification of the convention guarantees the country's full membership status in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the regional body tasked to manage tuna resources in the rich Pacific fishing grounds, he said.

The commission determines total allowable catch, allocate quotas to member-countries and regulate fishing methods.

Mr. Swerdlof said the conservation convention is a welcome development for the Southern Mindanao tuna industry, of which

80% is based in this city, as it stands to benefit from catch quota allocations from the \$3-billion Pacific resource.

The convention is an agreement among more than 20 Pacific and European countries to efficiently manage and conserve the Pacific Ocean's tuna resources.

Of the three tropical tuna species in the Pacific grounds, big-eye and yellow-fin are fished at or above maximum sustainable yield. Only skipjack tuna fisheries remain below its maximum sustainable yield.

According to GEM, a United States Agency for International Development-funded program, the tuna industry lands around 1,000 metric tons of tuna daily, equivalent to annual revenues reaching \$300 million.

This city is the country's leading supplier of canned tuna, high value sashimi tuna and tuna steaks to the Japanese, European and American markets.

At least seven of the country's nine canneries are operating in the city, while over 20 frozen sashimi export-based fish processing plants have made the city their home, providing employment to around 65,000.

The Philippines is a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN Fish Stock Agreement, which require the country to support global initiatives aimed as efficiently manage the region's highly migratory fish stocks.

MAJOR COMMITMENTS

Among the country's major commitments to the convention are:

- prevent or eliminate over-fishing in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, the world's primary tuna fishing grounds;
- to collect and provide accurate data on its total fish catches; and
- assess the impact of its fishing activities on relevant fish stocks.

The initiatives undertaken by the private sector-led Socskargen Federation of Fishing and Allied Industries, Inc. in partnership with GEM, helped paved the way for the ratification of the convention.

The federation drafted position papers that convinced officials from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Fisheries Industry Development Authority to attend international convention sessions and actively participate during the deliberations.

(Source: Business World, 8/22/05, page S17)